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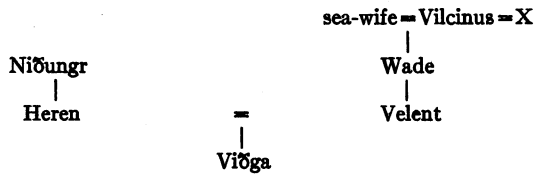
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## VIÐGA IN SCANDINAVIAN HERO LEGEND

In Scandinavian legends Viðga, the follower of Þiðrik, or Theodoric the Goth, has assumed such proportions as almost to overshadow his master. This Viðga, Vidga, Virga, or Vidrik, is by everyone recognized to be identical with the Wudga, follower of Eormenric, mentioned in the Old English poem *Widsith*, Widia, the follower of Theodoric, mentioned in *Waldere Frag. B*, and Witege of the South German "Volksepos."

The Scandinavian sources of the Viðga story fall in two groups,—the Old Norse *Þiðriks saga* and a group of Danish and Swedish heroic ballads. The *Þiðriks saga* is a thirteenth century saga based directly on North German sources. The introduction (*formáli*), though it may not belong to the original saga, gives early evidence of the German origin. The name-forms, and the very form of the legends, bear out the statement of the *formáli*. The other sources, the ballads, are according to Grundtvig<sup>1</sup> based on material brought from North Germany in the thirteenth century, though in their present form they date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Swedish ballads are based on the Danish.<sup>2</sup>

The story of Viðga in the Norse sources is much more complete than that preserved in English or German tradition. Most complete is the *Þiðriks saga* account, which relates Viðga's life from boyhood till death. The saga makes him Velent's (Wayland's) son, and establishes the following genealogy:



<sup>1</sup> *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser* I, 63.

<sup>2</sup> G. Storm: *Sagnkredsene om Karl den store og Didrik af Bern*, p. 169, argues that the ballads are based on the Swedish version of the saga. The same position is taken by Klockhoff: *Studier over Þiðriks saga*. Boer: *Ark. f. n. f.* XX, 103 ff. and 260 ff. supports Grundtvig.

After the death of Niðungr, Velent marries Heren, and brings her and the son Viðga to Sealand, where he succeeds to the throne.

A new section of the saga here sets in with the following words: "Her hefr sago Viðga sunnar Velennz ok kœmr sagan fram at Þiðriks sunnar Þetmar konungs af Bærn." The episode relates in a clear, coherent, and spirited way Viðga's departure from home and his entry into the service of Þiðrik. Velent equips him splendidly with the famous sword Mimungr, helmet and armor, a shield with the well known coat of arms—a hammer and tongs in gold, and three carbuncles, on a white base—and the stallion Skemming. Viðga after performing wonderful feats on the way, meets Þiðrik in single combat and overcomes him. He swears fealty to Þiðrik, and always remains loyal to him.

In the service of Þiðrik, Viðga performs many valiant deeds and only once is worsted in battle. The greatest feat of arms is Viðga's victory over Ætgeirr, the giant, an episode parallel to that portrayed in the Danish ballad *Kong Diderik og hans Kjemper*.<sup>3</sup> Particularly important in the saga account is Viðga's transference of allegiance from Þiðrik to Ermenrik. The saga is unique in explaining this through the marriage of Viðga to Bolfriana, the widow of Aki Aurlungatrausti. By this marriage Viðga becomes a vassal of Ermenrik. From this time on, Viðga is in a difficult situation; for war soon arises between Ermenrik and Þiðrik. Viðga remains loyal to his new master, Ermenrik, but avoids any hostile act against his old friends, Theodoric and his followers. Finally, however, in the last great struggle, the battle of Gronsport (i.e. die Rabenschlacht), Viðga becomes the unwilling slayer of the sons of Attila and of Þether, the brother of Þiðrik. Viðga, seeking to avoid combat, addresses Þether, "þat væit guð með mer at þat geri ek nauðiger ef ek drepr þik firir sakar þins bróðor." Þether neglects the words, and attacking, is soon slain. Pursued by Þiðrik, who now seeks revenge, Viðga flees to the sea and sinks into it in time to escape Þiðrik's wrath.

<sup>3</sup> *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* #7.

The Swedish version adds that in the sea he was received by his "fader fader modher" who brought him to "Sælandh." Later he went to Fimber where Þiðrik found him and slew him.

The second group of sources, the ballads, deal only with the hero's early life. Most important of these is *Kong Diderik og hans Kæmper* of which Grundtvig<sup>4</sup> gives nine Danish and four Swedish versions; Arwidson<sup>5</sup> gives four Swedish. The first of these *DgF.* #7, consists of two parts—Vidrik's fight with Langben Redsker, and Diderik's expedition against Isack, king of Berthingsland. All other redactions give one part only, two Danish and five Swedish give the first; six Danish and three Swedish, the second. Two Faeroe versions, clearly based on the Danish, join both episodes. The account of Viðga's fight with Langben Redsker corresponds in almost every detail to the *Þiðriks saga* report of his encounter with Ætgeirr Rise. Part two, the expedition against Isack of Berthingsland, also shows close resemblance to the saga, but here divergencies are greater.

According to *DgF.* #7A, Diderik and his heroes set out on an expedition to Berthingsland. On the way they have to pass through a wood where Langben Redsker lies. When the courage of the others fail, Vidrik promises to seek the giant. Boldly riding forward, he stirs the giant, who turns sleepily and speaks:

Siig mig fouerenn ungersuenndt  
aff dine vaaben sløffue.

Vidrik answers:

Skemming saa heder min guode hest  
er født paa Grimmer-stødt:  
Mimring heder mitt guode suerd,  
thett rinder y kiempe-blod.

This question and answer seem odd: and possibly, #7B has the more correct reading.

(Redsker): Huen monne suenden komen were  
ther saadan ordt tuorde sige?

(Vidrik): Werlandt heder min fader  
war en smed well (s)kōn:

<sup>4</sup> *Danmark gamle Folkeviser* I and IV.

<sup>5</sup> *Svenska Fornsånger*.

Buodell hede min moder,  
en koning datter wen.

This genealogy is very important; for it agrees with *Völundarkviða* and with *Deor's Lament*. The fight progresses until Vidrik slays the giant and wins the treasure. Here a bit of comedy—not known to the *Þiðriks saga*—is introduced to extol Vidrik at the expense of Diderik and his followers.

A31    Hannd thog Langbeen Ridsker  
         hand reysett hannom thill enn eg:  
         Saa redt hand thill Didericks thieldt  
         sagde hand hafde Redsker seett.

When Diderik and his men proceed, they are greatly frightened by the sight of Redsker and want to flee. Vidrik laughs mockingly:

Torde ieg manden leffuendis biide,  
thor y hannom icki döder see?

The second part of the ballad is devoted chiefly to a description of the shields of Diderik's men. Second in the list is that of Vidrik.

Ther skiner y de andenn skioldt  
en hamer och en thang  
denn förer Viderik Verlandzonn  
beder slaa och ingen thage thill fange.

The last part of the ballad is of interest only in that it brings together Siuord (Sigurð Fafnisbane) and Vidrik.

The ballads constantly remind us of Viderik's superiority over Diderik's other men. *Kong Diderik og Holger Danske, DgF. #17*, is of special interest, for it is evidently a bit of political propaganda. Here Diderik is the exponent of Germanism; Holger Danske represents Danish nationalism. Viderik Verlandson is here represented as a Danish knight opposing Diderik.

In all Scandinavian sources Viðga's glory bids fair to outshine that of Þiðrik. In all probability, he has been a hero of great popularity in North Germany—the original home of the

Danish Theodoric legends. English poems—also drawing from North German traditions—bear out this theory.

A comparison of the Scandinavian versions of the Viðga story with the South German accounts immediately shows a glaring difference in the treatment of Viðga's character. In South German epics, our hero is known as the "ungetriuwe Witege"—the typical villain. These epics, which stress Ditrich's later life,—his exile and his conflicts with Ermenrik, picture Witege as a renegade deserter from Ditrich. Particularly do the authors of *Alpharts Tod* and of the *Rabenschlacht* stress the faithlessness of Witege.

The Þiðriks saga, as we have already seen, makes a conscious effort to keep the character of Viðga clear and untainted. The episode of the slaying of Attila's sons and Ditrich's brother, which the *Rabenschlacht* makes so much of, and the desertion stressed in *Alphart*, the *Þiðriks saga* carefully explains away. There the slaying of the princes takes place against Viðga's will, and the desertion does not figure at all, for Viðga becomes the vassal of Ermenric, at Þiðrik's request, through the marriage with Bolfriana.

The Scandinavian ballads, as well as the Old English sources, deal only with Viðga's early life; they know him only as the noble champion. Theodoric's wars with Ermenric are not mentioned; therefore the *Rabenschlacht* and *Alphart* episodes are unknown. The ballads look upon Vidrik as a Danish champion and have lost all traditions of his Gothic origin. The Swedish ballads bring this even more home to us; for here we find name forms, as Hendrick Welambsson, which indicate total ignorance of the hero's origin. All the ballads join in extolling him at the expense of his fellows.

The complete development of the Viðga story is late. Early Norse sources, as the *Eddas* and the skaldic lays, do not know him at all. Though the *Eddas* have elaborate legends of Jǫrmunrekr (i.e. Eormenric), they know none of the later versions where Theodoric and Eormenric are joined. The Harlung story is the central motive. This has been joined loosely to the Volsung-Niblung material, a combination that presupposes a full

development of these legends. Theodoric is barely mentioned; Viðga not at all.

We know from English sources that Viðga figures early in traditions of Eormenric and of Theodoric. In *Widsith*, possibly from the early seventh century,<sup>6</sup> he is listed as one of the greatest of heroes and as a follower of Eormenric. In *Waldere B*, from the eighth century,<sup>7</sup> he is a follower of Theodoric. The poems refer to the hero, but with no elaborations of his deeds, implying a thorough knowledge of them. The stories must, therefore, have been fairly well developed and must have been common property in 7th and 8th century England. If, however, the figure of Viðga were anything but loosely connected with the Eormenric lays in the North German sources of *Widsith*, we should expect to find him in the early Scandinavian records, as the *Eddas*. This, we have already noticed, is not the case. In the *Waldere*, Widia figures as Theodoric's follower. This is prior to the union of the Theodoric and Eormenric stories. If, therefore, Viðga figures sometimes with one sometimes with the other, we are safe in supposing that he, as an epic hero, is only loosely bound to either one.

Better evidence for the lateness of the Viðga stories is the hero's place in the Weland legends. One of the central points in the Viðga stories still preserved is his descent from Weland. This fact is most clearly brought out in the Northern versions.<sup>8</sup> The ballads make Vidrik son of Werlandt and Buodell.<sup>9</sup> The *Þiðriks saga* gives: Viðga son of Velent and Heren, daughter of Niðungr. We immediately recognize in Buodell the Beaduhild, daughter of Nifhad mentioned in *Deor* and Bǫðvild of *Vǫlundarkviða*. Imagine Viðga, the hero, sprung from such a relationship! It is impossible to conceive of such a thing unless we presuppose a late and weakened Weland story; for in *Deor* and *Vǫlundarkviða*, Weland's violation of Beaduhild is an act of vengeance. Such a relationship could hardly be considered a

<sup>6</sup> Chambers: *Widsith*, p. 178; Holthausen; *Beowulf* II, xxvi.

<sup>7</sup> Müllenhoff: *Zfdä.* XII, 274; Holthausen: *Beowulf* II, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> North Germany is the home of the Weland stories; cf. Maurus: *Die Wieldandsage*.

<sup>9</sup> *DgF.* #7B.

proper source of a great epic hero. The weakening of the Weland story (that we must suppose) can actually be seen in the *Þiðriks saga*. There the old relationship shines through, but the author has lost sight of its significance. The Viðga story, as we know it, must then have reached its full development after the true significance of Weland's vengeance has been lost.

Even later comes the special South German development of the "ungetriuwe Witege." As Jiriczek has pointed out,<sup>10</sup> the change in Witege's character is the result of, or is it at least hastened by, the joining of the Eormenric and Theodoric cycles, in both of which he figured. The time of this fusion can be fairly well conjectured. In the *Hildebrandslied*, dating from ca. 800, Theodoric's main opponent is Odoacer; Eormenric is not mentioned. The *Quedlinburg Chronicle*, from about 1000,<sup>11</sup> relates that Ermenricus, instigated by Odoacar, drove his nephew Theodoricus from Verona and forced him to go into exile to Attila, king of the Huns. As Jiriczek points out, the chronicle clearly represents the first step in the change from the old conception of Odoacer as the leader of the opposition to the new where Eormenric takes over this rôle. Witege—the typical traitor—comes then, in all probability, after the year 1000.

The conclusion can now fairly reasonably be drawn that the Viðga story in its fully developed form, is late; but that the Scandinavian presentation of him, as a noble hero, antedates the South German and is nearer the original Viðga of Germanic tradition.

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<sup>10</sup> *Deutsche Heldensage*, p. 303.

<sup>11</sup> Gölther: *Deutsche Dichtung im Mittelalter*, p. 69.